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23. — *Lectures on the Study of History, delivered in Oxford, 1859 – 61.*

By GOLDWIN SMITH, M. A., Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Oxford. To which is added a Lecture delivered before the New York Historical Society in December, 1864, on the University of Oxford. New York: Harper and Brothers. 1866. 12mo. pp. 269.

THE Lectures on the Study of History which Professor Goldwin Smith delivered soon after his appointment to the chair of Modern History at Oxford have lost none of their value during the period that has since elapsed. They deserve to be more widely known than they have hitherto been in this country; and the debt which America owes to their author for his manly and powerful support of her great cause, for his hearty and generous sympathy in her efforts, will be still further increased by the service which will be rendered to the progress of truth by the clear statement, the liberal thought, and the advanced views of this volume.

There are few questions of deeper interest or higher importance than that of the nature of history. Connected on one side with the practical affairs of life, with the immediate course of human affairs, it is related on the other to the highest spiritual concerns, and upon its solution depends in great measure our view, not only of the nature of man as a moral being, but also of the nature of God, and of the modes by which the world is governed. The advocates of the doctrine of chance as the ruling principle of history are, in our days, neither numerous nor powerful; the advocates of the doctrine of law, those who assert that history is governed by absolute and determinable laws, are, on the other hand, numerous and able. The positivist school in science has invaded the domain of philosophy; and the continually strengthening sense of the control exercised by law over the material creation, in all its manifestations, leads to persistent and vigorous attempts to show that the moral world lies under the dominion of the same absolute and impersonal principle. History is regarded as one of the so-called physical sciences; and the course of human affairs is represented as subject to laws as inexorable and as determinable as those which control the motions of the planets or the changes of the surface of the globe.

Against this school of thinkers, as represented by Comte, Buckle, and their followers, Mr. Smith takes ground. His statement of the objections to the doctrines which they have propounded is one of the ablest that have been made; and the theory which he sets forth in opposition to theirs is a good corrective of their exaggerations, while it has an importance of its own through its recognition of conditions which

are wholly disregarded in the "necessarian" scheme. He denies that there is a "science" of history, that is, that it is governed by necessary laws which can be positively determined; but he likewise denies that history is a chaos because it has no necessary law. There is a philosophy of history, though there be no science. He adopts and vindicates the doctrine of historical progress, and he finds the source of this progress in the unimpeded efforts of the will of man, in the moral freedom of man, in the conscious struggle toward improvement. To him, the key of history is to be found, not in the progress of science under fixed, invariable fate-resembling laws, but in the formation by effort of man's character, which is pre-eminently religious and moral.

We regret that we cannot follow at length the argument of Mr. Smith. The reader is impressed not more with the intellectual attainments and powers of the author than with his moral earnestness and religious sincerity. His character penetrates and elevates all that he writes. Deeply religious without a shadow of bigotry, of a temper liberal without extravagance, with a moral nature pure and strong without a touch of asceticism, and with rare intellectual powers disciplined by the best culture, Mr. Smith stands in the ranks of the leaders of English thought. Far in advance of the mass even of the intelligent among his countrymen, he is one of the advanced guard of the defenders of liberty and religion, one of those men by whom the way into the future is opened for mankind without destructive violence or aimless wanderings.

In a merely literary aspect, this book, like all Mr. Smith's writings, is remarkable to a degree that is hardly yet recognized by his contemporaries. It is not too much to say that there is no writer of the present day who possesses a better style, who writes more manly, compact, simple, and racy English. He has attained to the command of beautiful and forcible language, which, in his own words in the first Lecture in this volume, "No man will be master of without being master of better things. Language is not a musical instrument, into which if a fool breathe, it will make melody. Its tones are evoked only by the spirit of high or tender thought; and though truth is not always eloquent, real eloquence is always the glow of truth."

Beside the Lectures on the Study of History and on Oxford, this volume contains an Inaugural Lecture, a Lecture "On some supposed Consequences of the Doctrine of Historical Progress," a letter on "The Moral Freedom of Man," and a Lecture "On the Foundation of the American Colonies."